



*We preserve our HISTORY for our FUTURE*

# 2021 - 2022 | Biennial Report



This report is required per MCA 22-3-1003 (12)

# Our Mission

The Montana Heritage Commission preserves and promotes Montana's Territorial Capital history and resources through quality visitor experiences and preservation of state-owned buildings and artifacts.

## MONTANA HERITAGE *Commission*



# Background and History

In 1997, the **Montana Legislature** purchased **Virginia City** and **Nevada City** from the Senator Charles Bovey family for \$6.5 million.

In 2000, **Reeder's Alley** was gifted to the state by Darrell and Kathy Guston.

Today the value we insure our properties and artifacts at is \$47.98 million.



Front of Content Corner (Montana's Territorial Capital-Legislative Offices in 1865)

The Montana Heritage Commission takes pride in managing some of the most valuable and fascinating historic sites in Montana – **Virginia City** and **Nevada City**, plus **Reeder's Alley** and the **Pioneer Cabin** in Helena. Our goal is to preserve and promote these sites while encouraging Montanans and our children to become excited about the rich history of this great state. Virginia City was the site of our territorial capital from 1864 – 1875.

MHC offices now occupy Montana's Territorial Capital Building in Virginia City, Montana.



Current photo of Montana's Territorial Capital-Legislative Offices

# Strategic Highlights



**“We preserve our HISTORY, for our FUTURE.”**

**MHC operating  
budget FY 2022:**

**\$2,270,000** approved budget (expenses)

**÷ \$74.6 million** (economic footprint)

**= 3,286%** Return on Investment

**Investing in history pays  
for Montana!**



**74.4 million economic  
footprint in Montana**



**Contributes to 1,226  
jobs in Montana**



**Has stewardship over 276  
heritage properties from the  
1860s to 1875 time period**



**Montana's #1 State owned tourist  
destination with over 1 million tourists  
visiting Virginia and Nevada City from  
Memorial Day to Labor day each year.**



**Reeder's Alley is one of the few  
original structures from Helena's  
territorial time period**



**Over 1 million Americana artifacts  
from the 1860 to 1960 time period**



# Strategic Priorities

The Montana Heritage Commission has the following (4) strategic priorities:

- (1) **PRESERVE:** Establish a more effective system to ensure proper allocation of resources, preservation and maintenance prioritization, and cataloging of historic buildings and artifacts.
- (2) **PROMOTE:** Expand marketing and promotional efforts to strengthen image and identity of the historic resources managed by The Montana Heritage Commission.
- (3) **PARTNER:** Broaden local, state, and federal support and understanding of the important contribution heritage makes to Montana's economy, cultural identity and sense of historic community.
- (4) **PROTECT:** Implement programs to enhance inventory to be compliant with insurance guidelines, fire suppression services and safe practices for our tourists to avoid injury and exposure to litigation.



# Goals and Objectives



➤ Continue being Montana's number one state owned tourist destination by increasing lodging facilities and marketing to weddings, socials gatherings, family reunions, school tours and music festivals.

➤ Implement approved preservation and maintenance projects based on available funding from revenue generated from tourism, earned revenue from concessionaires and funding from the Montana Legislature and Governor's Office.

➤ Promote at key locations that have demonstrated higher traffic referrals such as National Parks, visitor centers and expand our collection of tourism data through e-commerce, google analytics and results oriented marketing venues.

➤ Engage and educate state, local and non-profit partners to increase a sustainable funding resource for the long-term stabilization of state-owned resources and continue to enhance the visitor experience under our stewardship.

➤ Improve and increase educational outreach programs, internships and interpretation programs to enhance the

visitor experience and understanding of our history.

➤ Seek all available funding support through grants, donations and legislative appropriations to further our preservation of state-owned buildings and resources; and increase our economic footprint, job creation, and business development.

➤ Recruit and utilize volunteers/interns to give educational opportunities and to increase efficiency of operations with limited state funding.

➤ Improve ways in past perfect software to streamline inventory artifacts that can be more visible and transparent to the public.

➤ Continue to educate and implement best practices from other historic and tourism sites on financials, marketing and enhancement of visitor experiences.

➤ Protect state owned assets and tourists by partnering with Town Fire Departments, First Responders and local county Sherriff's Departments.

<http://montanaheritagecommission.mt.gov/>

# MHC Annual Operating Income

## Financials

### HOW ARE WE FUNDED?

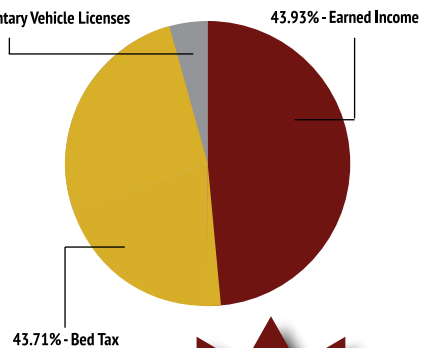
#### INCOME:

The Montana Heritage Commission operates on tourist related income from bed tax allocations, a voluntary vehicle license plate fee, and MHC earned revenue generated from MHC property vacation rentals, hotels, and entrance to museum fees.

#### FY 2022 Income Summary:

**Total Revenue/Allocation - \$2,287,612**

- \$1,004,886 - MHC Earned Income
- \$1,000,000 - Bed Tax Allocation
- \$282,726 - Voluntary Vehicle License Fees



Appropriations from legislature have been allocated in the past but are not an annual appropriation.

### WHERE DOES THE MONEY GO?

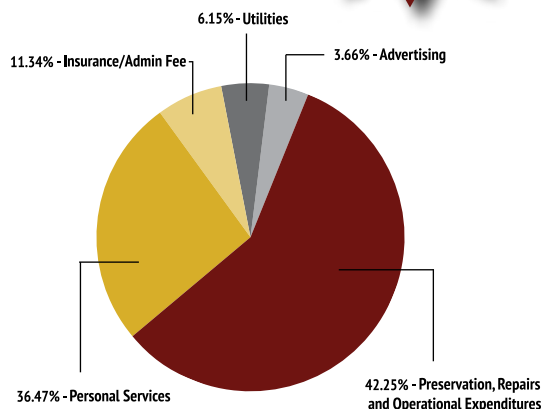
#### EXPENSES: MHC Operations

MHC Operations in Virginia City, Nevada City, and Reeder's Alley Operating costs include all personal services, preservation, promotion, repairs, maintenance, insurance, administrative and fees.

#### FY 2022 Total Operations Summary:

**Total - \$1,453,540**

- \$614,085 - Preservation, Repairs, & Operational Expenditures
- \$530,078 - Personal Services (5 Full Time, 15 Seasonal Employees)
- \$164,889 - Insurance/Admin Fee\*
- \$89,358 - Utilities
- \$53,130 - Advertising



\* Administrative Fee to Department of Commerce is 14.78% of Personal Services

## Collections and Archaeology

“Virginia City has one of the largest Americana artifact collections in the United States.”

— New York Times - July 21, 2002

**Our current Americana artifact inventory count is 1,317,281**

We preserve, stabilize and track collections using museum practices and standards for historic sites, catalog the objects, establish a written and electronic record, research the objects and their significance to Virginia City and Nevada City and the rest of the collection. We educate the public through research and exhibition of these historic objects.

View our artifact collection online at:  
[www.virginiacitymt.com](http://www.virginiacitymt.com)



Gypsy Verbal Fortune Teller



U.S. Cartridge Box Plate as found in the Bonanza Inn



U.S. Cartridge Box Plate



# Preserve and Partner



## Virginia City Information Center and Village Pump



Current Day

All earned revenue goes to non-profits that are in alignment with the Montana Heritage Commission strategic plan.

The Montana Heritage Commission restored this 1944 gas station and made it into a functioning gas station and Information Center.

In FY 2022 we were able to give the following grants through earned revenue:

- \$15,000 Historic Street Lights (Town of Virginia City)
- \$18,500 Virginia City Fire Department
- \$15,000 Virginia City Chamber of Commerce
- \$1500 Friend of the Thompson Hickman Library
- \$1500 Elks Lodge of Virginia City
- \$1500 Virginia City Preservation Alliance



# Preserve

## Stay in Montana's History

The Montana Heritage Commission's top priority was updating our accommodations so tourists and Montanans can come "Stay in Montana's History".

Over the past 2-3 years we have upgraded facilities to have 64 available rooms in state owned-properties to accommodate weddings, social gatherings and family reunions.

### Alder Gulch Accommodations

[AlderGulchAccommodations.com](http://AlderGulchAccommodations.com)

**\$199**

*Come and  
Stay & Play*

*Available  
Sun - Thurs*

- One night stay in our historic properties
- Unlimited rides on the train
- Gold panning at the River of Gold Entry to the Living History Museum
- Discounts at participating businesses



The Fairweather Inn added 17 bathrooms along with a fire suppression system and furniture upgrades.



The Nevada City Cabins and Nevada City Hotel received updated bathrooms and furniture.



## Stay in Montana's History

### Heritage Accommodations

[heritageaccommodations.com](http://heritageaccommodations.com)



**Dr. Daems and Corbitt Residences** were updated for vacation rental.



**The Bonanza Inn** bathrooms were remodeled, including electrical and plumbing upgrades as well as new furniture in the rooms.



**Harding Residence** was updated for vacation rental.



**Governor Thomas Francis Meagher Cabin** was updated for vacation rental.





# Preserve & Promote

## Discovery-Ellingsen Park



The Montana Heritage Commission completed Discovery-Ellingson Park that is dedicated to the men who discovered Virginia City and the man who dedicated his life to preserving it.



This park was designed for Social Gatherings, Music Festivals and Weddings. All revenue generated goes into future preservation projects in Virginia and Nevada City, MT.

# Promote

The Montana Heritage Commission's marketing campaign has a diverse campaign that encompasses Social Media and E-Commerce, Print Ad, TV, Radio and affordable packages such as the Vigilante Stay and Play pass. Through collaborate efforts with the Town of Virginia City and business owners, **Virginia and Nevada City are Montana's number one state-owned tourist destination with over 1 million tourists coming to visit each year.**

**"We advertise around our popular National parks in Zions, Yellowstone, Glacier and Yosemite, making Virginia and Nevada City a must see stop between the Parks."**

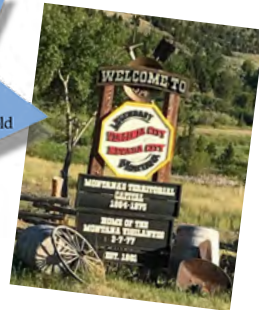


**\$199**

*Come and  
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*Available  
Sun-Thurs*

- ◆ One night stay in our historic properties
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- ◆ Entry to the Living History Museum
- ◆ Discounts at participating businesses





# Preserve

## Preservation for Seasonal Housing

**The Montana Heritage Commission completed much needed Seasonal Housing upgrades with two new bath houses and maintenance on 34 units located at Daylight Village.** These units help provide housing for the many businesses that operate during Memorial Day to Labor Day each year. The majority of this funding came from HB 652.



# Promote

## Business Development

The Montana Heritage Commission has business relationships with over 35 private businesses that rent from state-owned buildings.



Montana businesses keep our historic buildings standing!



# Promote

## Vigilante Family Pass

This pass is good for a family or group of 5 people for 2 days that include:

- ✓ Train rides on the Alder Gulch Short Line RR
- ✓ Gold panning at the River of Gold
- ✓ Entrance into the Living History Museum

**“The Montana Heritage Commission has developed the Vigilante family pass so Montana families and tourists can experience Montana’s History in a affordable way, for \$125.”**





# Promote



## Films Shot in VC/NC

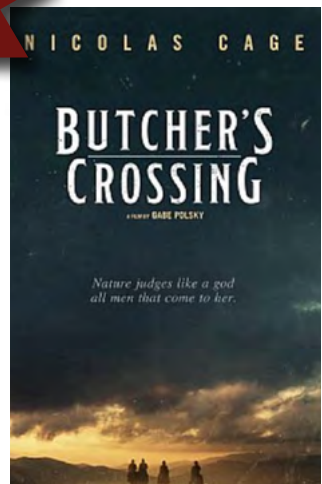


- Little Big Man - 1970
- Missouri Breaks - 1975
- Thousand Pieces of Gold - 1989
- Unsolved Mysteries, "Plummer's Gold" - 1989
- Return to Lonesome Dove - 1993
- The Patriot - 1997
- History's Mysteries: The Vigilantes - 1999
- Bob Viva's Restore America - 1999
- Ligia - 2001
- Enemy of the People - 2001



Virginia City wins Film  
Friendly Community  
of the Year

- Frontier House - 2001
- A Moment of Peace - 2002
- Taking Chance - 2009
- History Channel Ghost Stories Series - 2009
- American Experience Series, "Custer's Last Stand" - 2011
- La Route Du Western - 2011
- Absaroka: Sins - 2013
- Any Bullet Will Do - 2015
- Jack Slade - 2015
- BBC Production, "Mountains" - 2016
- Ride by Night - 2016
- Ballad of Lefty Brown - 2017
- C.M. Russell and the American West - 2017
- Discovery Channel - Expedition Unknown - 2018
- Butcher's Crossing - 2021



# Promote

## Famous English Photographer David Yarrow and Animals of Montana

Photography shoots in Virginia City and Nevada City Montana.  
Featured below is Cindy Crawford “America’s Supermodel”,  
Olivia Culpo - Miss Universe and Kate Bock Sports Illustrated Model of the Year

A portion of proceeds  
from the David  
Yarrow Book went to  
preservation of buildings  
located in Virginia City  
and Nevada City, Montana.





# Promote

## Education Outreach and Living History Interpretation

The Montana Heritage Commission Living History program helps tourists understand what it was like to live in the 1860's through interactive interpretive experiences.

**MHC offers a diverse range of educational programs and reaches out to Montana schools K-12.** School groups from across Montana visit Reeder's Alley and enjoy guided tours in Virginia City and Nevada City.

Approximately 5,000 Montana students come each year for school tours.



The Chicago Times has ranked the Montana Heritage Commission Living History program in Virginia and Nevada City #4 in the nation as a 'Top Living History Destination.'

# Protect

**The Montana Heritage Commission is active in protecting the states heritage and resources through insurance programs and a strong supporter of the local Fire Departments.**

The Montana Heritage Commission was able to upgrade the Nevada City fire pump that services fire protection of restaurants, hotels, cabins and museums located on state property.

It remains the top priority to have fire suppression services in all restaurants, vacation rentals and hotels.



The MHC purchased the state a fire truck to be on site at the NC Museum/NC Hotels and Cabins.



In FY 2022 the Montana Heritage Commission matches fundraising efforts for the Fire Department with this year giving a total \$12,500

MHC pays \$59,022 annually to insure (Risk Management) its building structures and artifacts.... The estimated value of state owned resources in 2022 is \$47.98 Million

# Partner

The Montana Heritage Commission (MHC) is a small state agency and partnerships are critical for us to leverage funding and staff resources. Partnerships help us gather expertise and skills to achieve our goals.

## Some of the partners we have worked with over the past two years include:

- AmeriCorps (NCCC)
- Ancient Order of the Hibernians (Butte/Helena)
- Butte Silver Bow Public Archives
- Elderhostel (Dillon)
- Friends of the Cumbres Toltec Railroad
- Madison County
- Mai Wah Society
- Montana Conservation Corps
- Montana Historical Society
- Montana History Foundation
- Montana Preservation Alliance
- Montana State University - Project Archeology
- MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks
- MT Ghost Town Society
- National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Ruby Valley Conservation District
- Town of Virginia City
- Trout Unlimited
- University of Montana
- US Forest Service
- Virginia City Area Chamber of Commerce
- Virginia City Preservation Alliance
- Volunteers for the MT Heritage Commission
- Washington State University
- Youth Challenge (Dillon)



# MHC Commissioners and Staff

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**Charity Fechter – Member at Large**

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**Jeffrey Ewelt – Tourism Advisory Council**

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**David Hoffman – Appointment by  
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Elijah Allen

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Marge Antolik & Kate Steeley

**Preservation Specialists**  
Jeff Cleverly & Donny Steeley

**Tourism Event Coordinator**  
Becky Digiovanna

**Education Outreach Living History**  
Creative Edu Ventures - Leona Stredwick



# Honorary Ribbon Cutting Ceremony



## Saving Montana's Territorial Capital Building [www.savemontanashistory.com](http://www.savemontanashistory.com) (To see top preservation projects and to donate online)



In May of 2022 the state acquired Montana's Oldest Standing Territorial Building known as Stonewall Hall. We had honorary ribbon cutting ceremony to celebrate that we have raised over 1 million dollars from PRIVATE individuals to help stabilize and preserve this important piece of history.

\* This donation came from the Lefever family.



2022



Governor Gianforte



Circa: 1860s







Reference: The Rocky Mountain Economic Improvement District

## Montana Heritage Commission

P.O. Box 338 | Virginia City, MT 59755 | [montanaheritagecommission.mt.gov](http://montanaheritagecommission.mt.gov)